THE ENTERTAINMENT OF THE STAGE,

A

Corrupt and Sinful Entertainment,

CONTRARY

To the whole Nature of Chriſtian Piety, and conſtantly to be avoided by all ſincere Chriſtians.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

I *Have only one Thing to deſire of the Reader, Not that he would like and approve of theſe Reflections; but that he will not ſuffer himſelf to diſlike or condemn them, till he has put his Arguments into Form, and knows how many Doctrines of Scripture he can bring againſt thoſe Things that I have aſſerted. So far as he can ſhew that I have reaſoned wrong, or miſtook the Doctrine of Scripture, ſo far he has a Right to cenſure. But* general Diſlikes *are mere* Tempers, *as blind as* Paſſions, *and are always the ſtrongeſt where Reaſons are moſt wanted. If People will diſlike, becauſe they will, and condemn Doctrines, only becauſe it ſuits better with their* Tempers *and* Practices, *than to conſider and underſtand them to be true; they act by the ſame Spirit of* Popery, *as is moſt remarkable in the* loweſt Bigots, *who are reſolute in a* general Diſlike *of all* Proteſtant *Doctrines, without ſuffering themſelves to conſider and underſtand upon what Truth they are founded.*

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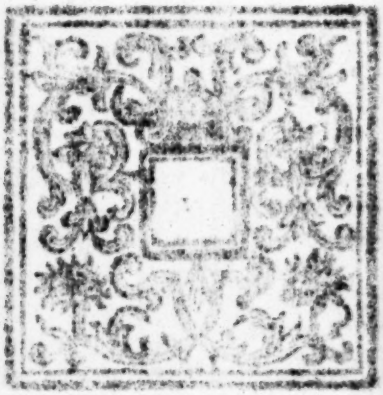

The ENTERTAINMENT *of the* STAGE, *is a corrupt and ſinful Entertainment*, &c.

I HAVE ſhewn you elſewhere, that the reading of *Plays*, or any other Books of that kind, is a dangerous and ſinful Entertainment, that corrupts our Hearts, and ſeparates the Holy Spirit from us. You will now perhaps ask me, if it is unlawful for a Chriſtian to go to the *Play-houſe*. I anſwer, that it is abſolutely unlawful. As unlawful, as for a Chriſtian to be a *Drunkard*, or a *Glutton*, or to *Curſe* and *Swear*. This I think will be eaſily prov'd.

FOR let us conſider the Doctrine of the Apoſtle, we are abſolutely forbid all *corrupt Communication*, and for this important Reaſon, becauſe it *grieves* and

and *ſeparates* the Holy Spirit from us. Is it unlawful therefore to have any *corrupt Communication* of our own? And can we think it *lawful* to go to *Places ſet apart* for that Purpoſe? To give our Money, and *hire* Perſons to corrupt our Hearts with ill Diſcourſes, and inflame all the diſorderly Paſſions of our Nature? We have the Authority of Scripture to affirm, That *evil Communication corrupts good Manners*; and that *unedifying Diſcourſes grieve the Holy Spirit*. Now the *third* Commandment is not more plain and expreſs againſt *Swearing*, than this Doctrine is plain and poſitive againſt going to the *Play-houſe*. If you ſhould ſee a Perſon, that acknowledges the *third* Commandment to be a Divine Prohibition againſt *Swearing*, yet going to a *Houſe*, and giving his *Money* to Perſons, who were there met, to *Curſe* and *Swear* in fine Language, and invent *muſical Oaths* and *Imprecations*, would you not think him Mad in the higheſt Degree? Now conſider, whether there be a leſs Degree of Madneſs in going to the *Play-houſe*. You own, that God has called you to a great Purity of Converſation, that you are forbid all *fooliſh Diſcourſe*, and *filthy Jeſtings*, as expreſly, as you are forbid *Swearing*; that you are to let no *corrupt Communication* proceed out of your Mouth, but *ſuch as is good for the Uſe of edifying*; and yet you go to the *Houſe ſet apart* for corrupt Communications, you hire Perſons to entertain you with all manner of *Ribbaldry*, *Prophaneſs*, *Rant*, and *Impurity* of Diſcourſe; who are to preſent you with *vile* Thoughts, and *lewd* Imaginations in *fine Language*, and to make *wicked*, *vain*, and *impure* Diſcourſe, more lively and affecting, than you could poſſibly have it in any ill Company. Now, is not this ſinning with as high a Hand, and

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as groſly offending againſt the plain Doctrines of Scripture, as if you was to give your *Money* to be entertained with *muſical Oaths* and *Curſes?* You might reaſonably think that *Woman* very ridiculous in her *Piety*, that durſt not Swear herſelf, but ſhould nevertheleſs frequent *Places* to hear *Oaths*. But you may as juſtly think her very ridiculous in her *Modeſty*, who, tho' ſhe dares not to ſay, or look, or do an immodeſt Thing her ſelf, ſhall yet give her *Money*, to ſee *Women* forget the *Modeſty* of their Sex, and talk *impudently* in a publick *Play-houſe*. If the *Play-houſe* was fill'd with *Rakes* and ill *Women*, there would be nothing to be wonder'd at in ſuch an Aſſembly; for *ſuch Perſons* to be delighted with ſuch Entertainments, is as natural, as for any *Animal* to delight in its proper *Element*. But for Perſons who profeſs Purity and Holineſs, who would not be ſuſpected of *Immodeſty* or *corrupt Communication*, for them to come under the Roof of a *Houſe devoted* to ſuch ill Purpoſes, and be pleas'd Spectators of ſuch Actions and Diſcourſes, as are the Pleaſure of the moſt abandon'd Perſons; for them to give their Money to be thus entertain'd, is ſuch a Contradiction to all Piety and common Senſe, as cannot be ſufficiently expos'd.

AGAIN, when you ſee the *Players* acting with Life and Spirit, Men and Women *equally bold* in all Inſtances of *Prophaneſs*, *Paſſion*, and *Immodeſty*, I dare ſay, you never ſuſpect any of them to be Perſons of *Chriſtian Piety*. You can't even in your Imagination join Piety to ſuch Manners, and ſuch a Way of Life. Your Mind will no more allow you to join Piety with the Behaviour of the *Stage*, than it will allow you to think *two* and *two* to be *ten*. And perhaps you had rather ſee your Son chain'd

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to a *Galley*, or your Daughter driving *Plow*, than getting their Bread on the *Stage*, by adminiſtring in ſo ſcandalous a Manner to the Vices and corrupt Pleaſures of the World. Let this therefore be another Argument to prove the *abſolute Unlawfulneſs* of going to a *Play*. For conſider with your ſelf, is the Buſineſs of *Players* ſo contrary to Piety, ſo inconſiſtent with the Spirit and Temper of a true Chriſtian, that it is next to a Contradiction to ſuppoſe them united? How then can you take your ſelf to be *Innocent*, who *delight* in their Sins, and *hire* them to commit them? You may make your ſelf a Partaker of other Men's Sins, by Negligence, and for want of reproving them; but certainly, if you ſtand by, and aſſiſt Men in their Evil Actions, if you make their Vices your Pleaſure and Entertainment, and pay your Money to be ſo entertained, you make your ſelf a Partaker of their Sins in a very high Degree. And conſequently it muſt be as unlawful to go to a *Play*, as it is unlawful to approve, encourage, aſſiſt, and reward a Man for *renouncing* a Chriſtian Life. Let therefore every *Man* or *Woman* that goes to a *Play*, ask themſelves this Queſtion, Whether it ſuits with their Religion to act the *Parts* that are there acted? Perhaps they would think this as inconſiſtent with that Degree of Piety that they profeſs, as to do the vileſt Things. But let them conſider, that it muſt be a wicked and unlawful Pleaſure, to delight in any Thing that they dare not do themſelves. Let them alſo conſider, that they are really *acting* thoſe Indecencies and Impieties themſelves, which they think is the particular Guilt of the *Players*. For a Perſon may very juſtly be ſaid to do that *himſelf*, which he *pays* for the doing, and which is done for his Pleaſure.

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You muſt therefore, if you would be conſiſtent with your ſelf, as much abhor the Thoughts of being at a *Play*, as of being a *Player* your ſelf; for to think that you muſt forbear the one and not the other, is as abſurd, as to ſuppoſe, that you muſt be temperate your ſelf, but may aſſiſt, encourage, and reward other People for their Intemperance. The Buſineſs of a *Player* is prophane, wicked, lewd, and immodeſt, to be any Way therefore approving, aſſiſting, or encouraging him in ſuch a Way of Life, is as evidently ſinful, as 'tis ſinful to aſſiſt and encourage a Man in *Stealing*, or any other Wickedneſs.

To proceed. When I conſider *Churches*, and the Matter of *Divine Service*, that it conſiſts of holy Readings, Prayers, and Exhortations to Piety, there is Reaſon to think, that the Houſe of God is a natural Means of promoting Piety, and Religion, and rendering Men devout and ſenſible of their Duty to God. The very Nature of Divine Aſſemblies, thus carried on, has this direct Tendency. I ask you whether this is not very plain, that *Churches* thus employed ſhould have this Effect.

Consider therefore the *Play-houſe*, and the Matter of the Entertainment there, as it conſiſts of *Love-intreagues*, *blaſphemous Paſſions*, *prophane Diſcourſes*, *lewd Deſcriptions*, *filthy Jeſts*, and all the moſt extravagant Rant of wanton, vile, profligate Perſons of both Sexes, heating and inflaming one another with all the *Wantonneſs* of Addreſs, the *Immodeſty* of Motion, and *Lewdneſs* of Thought, that Wit can invent; conſider, I ſay, whether it be not plain, that a Houſe ſo employed, is as certainly ſerving the Cauſe of *Immorality* and *Vice*, as the Houſe of God is ſerving the Cauſe of *Piety*? For what is there in our *Church-Service*, that ſhews it

to be *useful* to Piety and Holineſs? What is there in Divine Worſhip to correct and amend the Heart, but what is directly *contrary* to all that is doing in the *Play-houſe*? So that one may with the ſame Aſſurance affirm, that the *Play-houſe*, not only when ſome very prophane Play is on the *Stage*, but in its *daily*, *common* Entertainment, is as certainly the *Houſe of the Devil*, as the Church is the *Houſe of God*. For though the Devil be not profeſſedly worſhipped by Hymns directed to him, yet moſt that is there Sung is to his Service, he is there *obeyed* and *pleaſed* in as certain a Manner, as God is Worſhipped and Honoured in the Church.

You muſt eaſily ſee, that this Charge againſt the *Play-houſe*, is not the Effect of any *particular Temper*, or *Weakneſs* of Mind, that it is not an *uncertain Conjecture*, or *religious Whimſy*, but is a Judgment founded as plainly in the *Nature* and *Reaſon* of Things, as when it is affirmed that the Houſe of God is of Service to Religion. And he that abſolutely condemns the *Play-houſe*, as wicked and corrupting, proceeds upon as much Truth and Certainty, as he that abſolutely commends the *Houſe of God*, as Holy, and tending to promote Piety.

When therefore any one pretends to vindicate the *Stage* to you, as a proper Entertainment for holy and religious Perſons, you ought to reject the Attempt with as much Abhorrence, as if he ſhould offer to ſhew you, that our *Church-Service* was rightly formed for thoſe Perſons to join in, who are *devoted to the Devil*. For to talk of the *Lawfulneſs* and *Uſefulneſs* of the *Stage* is fully as abſurd, as contrary to the plain Nature of Things, as to talk of the *Unlawfulneſs* and *Miſchief* of the Service of the Church. He therefore that tells you, that you may

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ſafely go to the *Play-houſe*, as an innocent, uſeful Entertainment of your Mind, commits the ſame Offence, againſt common Senſe, as if he ſhould tell you, that it was dangerous to attend at Divine Service, and that its *Prayers* and *Praiſes* were great *Pollutions* of the Mind.

For the Matter and Manner of *Stage-entertainments*, is as undeniable a Proof, and as obvious to common Senſe, that the Houſe belongs to the Devil, and is the Place of his Honour, as the Matter and Manner of *Church-Service* proves that the Place is appropriated to God.

Observe therefore, that as you do not want the Aſſiſtance of any one, to ſhew you the *Uſefulneſs* and *Advantage* of Divine Service, becauſe the Thing is plain, and ſpeaks for itſelf. So neither, on the other Hand, need you any one to ſhew you the *Unlawfulneſs* and *Miſchief* of the Stage, becauſe there the Thing is equally plain, and ſpeaks for itſelf. So that you are to conſider your ſelf, as having the ſame Aſſurance that the *Stage* is wicked, and to be abhorred and avoided by all Chriſtians, as you have that the Service of the Church is Holy, and to be ſought after by all Lovers of Holineſs. Conſider therefore, that your Conduct, with Relation to the *Stage*, is not a Matter of *Nicety* or *ſcrupulous Exactneſs*, but that you are as certain that you do Wrong in as notorious a Manner, when you go to the *Play-houſe*, as you are certain that you do Right, when you go to *Church*.

Now it is of mighty Uſe to conceive Things in a right Manner, and to ſee them as they are in their own Nature. While you conſider the *Play-houſe*, as only a *Place of Diverſion*, it may perhaps give no Offence to your Mind: There is nothing *ſhocking* in

the Thought of it; but if you would lay aside this Name of it for a while, and consider it in its *own Nature*, as it really is, you will find that you are as much deceived, if you consider the *Play-house*, as only a *Place of Diversion*, as you would be, if you considered the House of God only as a *Place of Labour*.

When therefore you are tempted to go to a *Play*, either from your own Inclination, or the Desire of a Friend, fancy that you was asked in plain Terms to go to the Place of the *Devil's Abode*, where he holds his *filthy Court* of evil Spirits; that you was asked to join in an Entertainment, where he was at the *Head* of it, where the whole of it was in order to his Glory, that Men's Hearts and Minds might be separated from God, and plunged into all the Pollutions of Sin and Brutality. Fancy that you was going to a Place that as certainly belongs to the Devil, as the *Heathen Temples* of old, where *Brutes* were worshipped, where *wanton Hymns* were Sung to *Venus*, and *drunken Songs* to the God of *Wine*. Fancy that you was as certainly going to the Devil's Triumph, as if you was going to those *old Sports*, where People committed Murder, and offered Christians to be devoured by wild Beasts, for the Diversion of Spectators. Now whilst you consider the *Play-house* in this View, I suppose that you can no more go to a *Play*, than you can expresly renounce your Christianity.

Consider therefore now, that you have not been frighting your self with *groundless Imaginations*, but that what you have here fancied of the *Play-house* is as strictly true, as if you had been fancying, that when you go to Church, you go into the House of God, where the heavenly Host attend upon his Service;

vice; and that when you there read the Scriptures, and ſing holy Praiſes, you join with the Quires above, and do God's Will on Earth as it is done in Heaven. For obſerve, I pray you, how juſtly that Opinion of the *Play-houſe* is founded. For, was it a Joy and Delight to the Devil to ſee *Idols worſhipp'd*, to ſee Hymns and Adorations offer'd up to impure and filthy Deities? Were Places and Feſtivals appointed for ſuch Ends, juſtly eſteem'd Places and Feſtivals devoted to the Devil? Now give the Reaſon why all this was juſtly reckoned a Service to the Devil, and you will give as good a Reaſon, why the *Play-houſe* is to be eſteemed his *Temple*. For, what though Hymns and Adorations are not offered to impure and filthy Deities, yet if *Impurity* and *Filthineſs* is there the *Entertainment*, if immodeſt Songs, prophane Rant, if Luſt and Paſſion entertain the Audience, the Buſineſs is the ſame, and the Aſſembly does the *ſame Honour* to the Devil, though they are not gathered together in the Name of ſome *Heathen God*.

For Impurity and Prophaneſs, in the Worſhippers of the true God, is as acceptable a Service to the Devil, as Impurity and Prophaneſs in any Idolaters, and perhaps a *lewd Song* in an Aſſembly of Chriſtians gives him greater Delight, than if it had been ſung in a Congregation of *Heathens*.

If therefore we may juſtly ſay, that a *Houſe* or *Feſtival* was the Devil's, becauſe he was *delighted* with it, becauſe what was there done, was an *acceptable* Service to him, we may be aſſured that the *Play-houſe* is as really the Houſe of the Devil, as any other Houſe ever was. Nay, it is reaſonable to think that the *Play-houſes* in this Kingdom are a greater Pleaſure to him than any *Temple* he ever had

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in the *Heathen World*. For as it is a greater Conqueſt to make the Diſciples of Chriſt delight in *Lewdneſs* and *Prophaneſs*, than ignorant Heathens, ſo a *Houſe*, that in the Midſt of *Chriſtian Churches*, trains up Chriſtians in *Lewdneſs* and *Prophaneſs*, that makes the Worſhippers of Chriſt flock together in Crowds to rejoice in an Entertainment, that is as contrary to the Spirit of Chriſt, as *Hell* is contrary to *Heaven*, a Houſe ſo employed may juſtly be reckoned a more delightful Habitation of the Devil, than any Temple in the Heathen World. When therefore you go to the *Play-houſe*, you have as much Aſſurance, that you go to the Devil's peculiar Habitation, that you ſubmit to his Deſigns, and rejoice in his Diverſions, (which are his beſt Devices againſt Chriſtianity) you have as muſt Aſſurance of this, as that they who worſhipped filthy Deities, were in reality Worſhippers of the Devil.

AGAIN, Conſider thoſe *old Sports* and *Diverſions*, where Chriſtians were ſometimes thrown to wild Beaſts, conſider why ſuch Sports might well be looked upon as the *Devil's Triumph*. I ſuppoſe you are at no Stand with your ſelf, whether you ſhould impute ſuch Entertainments to the Devil: Conſider therefore, why you ſhould not as readily allow the *Stage* to be his Entertainment.

FOR was it a Delight to the Devil to ſee Heathens ſporting with the bodily Death of Chriſtians? And muſt it not be a greater Delight to him to ſee Chriſtians ſporting themſelves in the Death of their Souls?

THE Heathens could only kill the Body, and ſeparate it from the Soul, but theſe Chriſtian-Diverſions murder the Soul, and ſeparate it from God. I dare ſay, no Arguments could convince you, that

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it was *lawful* to rejoice at thoſe Sports, which were thus defiled with human Blood; but then pray remember, that if the Death of the Soul be as great a Cruelty, as the Death of the Body, if it be as dreadful for a Soul to be ſeparated from God, as to be ſeparated from the Body, you ought to think it as entirely unlawful to enter that Houſe, where ſo many eternal Lives are ſacrificed, or ever to partake of thoſe Diverſions which ſeparate ſuch Numbers of Souls from God.

HENCE it appears, that if inſtead of conſidering the *Play-houſe*, as only a Place of Diverſion, you will but examine what Materials it is made of; if you will but conſider the Nature of the Entertainment, and what is there doing, you will find it as wicked a Place, as ſinful a Diverſion, and as truly the peculiar Pleaſure and Triumph of the Devil, as any wicked Place, or ſinful Diverſion, in the Heathen World. When therefore you are ask'd to go to a *Play*, don't think that you are ask'd only to go to a *Diverſion*, but be aſſured that you are ask'd to *yield* to the Devil, to go over to his *Party*, and to make one of his Congregation; that if you do go, you have not only the Guilt of *buying* ſo much vain and corrupt Communication, but are alſo as certainly guilty of going to the Devil's Houſe, and doing him the ſame Honour, as if you was to partake of ſome *Heathen Feſtival*.

YOU muſt conſider, that all the Laughter there, is not only vain and fooliſh, but that it is a Laughter amongſt Devils, that you are upon *prophane Ground*, and hearing Muſick in the very Porch of Hell,

THUS it is in the Reaſon of the Thing, and if we ſhould now conſider the State of our *Play-houſe*

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as it is in Fact, we should find it answering all these Characters, and producing Effects suitable to its Nature: But I shall forbear this Consideration, it being as unnecessary to tell the Reader that our *Play-house* is in Fact the *Sink of Corruption and Debauchery*, that it is the general Rendezvouze of the most profligate Persons of both Sexes, that it corrupts the Air, and turns the adjacent Places into publick Nusances; this is as unnecessary, as to tell him, that the *Exchange* is a Place of *Merchandize*.

Now it is to be observed, that this is not the State of the *Play-house*, through any accidental Abuse, as any innocent or good Thing may be abused; but that Corruption and Debauchery, are the truely natural and genuine Effects of the *Stage-Entertainment*. Let not therefore any one say, that he is not answerable for those Vices and Debaucheries, which are occasioned by the *Play-house*, for so far as he partakes of the Pleasure of the *Stage*, and is an Encourager of it, so far he is chargeable with those Disorders which necessarily are occasioned by it. If Evil arises from our doing our Duty, or our Attendance at any *good Design*, we are to not to be frighted at it; but if Evil arises from any thing as its *natural* and *genuine* Effect, in all such Cases, so far as we contribute to the Cause, so far we make our selves guilty of the Effects. So that all who any way assist the *Play-house*, or ever encourage it by their Presence, make themselves chargeable in some Degree, with all the Evils and Vices which follow from it. Since therefore it cannot be doubted by any one, whether the *Play-house* be a Nursery of Vice and Debauchery, since the evil Effects it has upon People's Manners, is as visible as the Sun at Noon, one would imagine, that all People of Virtue

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and Modeſty, ſhould not only avoid it, but avoid it with the utmoſt Abhorrence; that they ſhould be ſo far from entering into it, that they ſhould deteſt the very Sight of it. For what a Contradiction is it to common Senſe, to hear a Woman lamenting the miſerable Lewdneſs and Debauchery of the Age, the vicious Taſte, and irregular Pleaſures of the World, and at the ſame time dreſſing her ſelf to meet the lewdeſt Part of the World, at the Fountain-Head of all Lewdneſs, and making her ſelf one of that Crowd, where every abandon'd Wretch is glad to be preſent? She may fancy that ſhe hates and abominates their Vices, but ſhe may depend upon it, that till ſhe hates and abominates the Place of vicious Pleaſures, till ſhe dare not come near an Entertainment which is the Cauſe of ſo great Debauchery, and the Pleaſure of the moſt debauched People, till ſhe is thus diſpoſed, ſhe wants the trueſt Sign of a real and Religious Abhorrence of the Vices of the Age.

For, to wave all other Conſiderations, I would only ask her a Queſtion or two on the ſingle Article of *Modeſty*. What is Modeſty? Is it a little *mechanical outſide* Behaviour, that goes no farther than a few *Forms and Modes* at particular Times and Places? Or is it a *real Temper*, a rational Diſpoſition of the Heart, that is founded in *Religion*? Now if Modeſty is only a mechanical Obſervance of a little outſide Behaviour, then I can eaſily perceive how a modeſt Woman may frequent *Plays*; there is no Inconſiſtency for ſuch a one to be one Thing in one Place, and another in another Place, to diſdain an immodeſt Converſation, and yet at the ſame time reliſh and delight in immodeſt and impudent Speeches in a publick *Play-houſe*. But if

Modeſty is a *real Temper* and Diſpoſition of the Heart, that is founded in the Principles of Religion, then I confeſs, I cannot comprehend how a Perſon of ſuch Modeſty, ſhould ever come twice into a *Play-houſe*. For if it is Reaſon and Religion that has inſpired her with a Modeſt Heart, that makes her careful of her Behaviour, that makes her hate and abhore every Word, or Look, or Hint, in Converſation, that has the Appearance of Lewdneſs, that makes her ſhun the Company of ſuch as talk with too much Freedom; if ſhe is thus modeſt in *common Life*, from a Principle of Religion, a Temper of Heart, is it poſſible for ſuch a one (I don't ſay to ſeek) but to bear with the Immodeſty and Impudence of the *Stage*? For muſt not Immodeſty and Impudence, muſt not looſe and wanton Diſcourſe be the ſame *hateful Things*, and give the ſame Offence to a modeſt Mind, in one Place, as in another? And muſt not that Place, which is the Seat of Immodeſty, where Men and Women are trained up in Lewdneſs, where almoſt every Day in the Year, is a Day devoted to the Fooliſh Repreſentations of *Raut*, *Luſt*, and *Paſſion*; muſt not ſuch a Place, of all others, be the moſt odious to a Mind that is *truly Modeſt* upon Principles of *Reaſon and Religion*? One would ſuppoſe, that ſuch a Perſon ſhould as much abominate the Place, as any other filthy Sight, and be as much offended with an Invitation to it, as if ſhe was invited to ſee an immodeſt Picture. For the Repreſentations of the *Stage*, the inflamed Paſſions of Lovers there deſcribed, are as groſs an Offence to the Ear, as any Repreſentation that can offend the Eye.

It ought not to be concluded, that becauſe I affirm the *Play-houſe* to be an Entertaiment *contray*

to

to Modeſty, that therefore I accuſe all People as void of Modeſty, who ever go to it. I might affirm, that *Tranſubſtantiation* is contrary to all *Senſe* and *Reaſon*; but then it would be a wrong Concluſion to ſay, that I affirmed that all who believe it are void of all Senſe and Reaſon. Now as *Prejudices*, the Force of *Education*, the Authority of *Numbers*, the Way of *World*, the Example of *great Names*, may make People *believe*, ſo the ſame Cauſes may make People *act* againſt *all Senſe and Reaſon*, and be guilty of Practices which no more ſuit with the *Purity* of their Religion, than *Tranſubſtantiation* agrees with *common Senſe*.

To proceed. I once heard a young Lady thus excuſing her ſelf for going to the *Play houſe*, that ſhe went but ſeldom, and then in Comp ny of her *Mother* and her *Aunt*, that they always knew their *Play* before-hand, and never went on the *Sacrament-Week*. And what Harm, pray, ſays ſhe, can there be in this? It breaks in upon no Rules of my Life, I neglect no Part of my Duty, I go to *Church*, and perform the ſame Devotions at Home, as on other Days. It ought to be obſerved, that this Excuſe can only be allowed where the *Diverſion* it ſelf is *innocent*; it muſt therefore be firſt conſidered, what the Entertainment is in it ſelf, whether it be ſuitable to the Spirit and Temper of Religion; for if it is right and proper in it ſelf it needs no Excuſe; but if it be *wrong* and *dangerous* to Religion, we are not to uſe it *cautiouſly*, but avoid it *conſtantly*.

Secondly, It is no Proof of the Innocency of a Thing, that it does not interfere with our *Hours of Duty*, nor break the Regularity of our Lives, for very wicked Ways of ſpending Time, may yet be conſiſtent with a regular Diſtribution of our Hours.

She muſt therefore conſider, not only whether ſuch a Diverſion hinders the Regularity of her Life, or breaks in upon her Devotions, publick or private, but whether it hinders or any way affects that *Spirit and Temper*, which all her Devotions aſpire after. Is it conformable to that Heavenly Affection, that Love of God, that Purity of Heart, that Wiſdom of Mind, that Perfection of Holineſs, that Contempt of the World, that Watchfulneſs and Selfdenial, that Humility and Fear of Sin? Is it conformable to theſe Graces, which are to be the *daily Subject* of all her Prayers? This is the only Way for her to know the *Innocency* of going to *Play*. If what ſhe there hears and ſees, has no *Contrariety* to any *Graces* or *Virtues* which ſhe prays for, if all that there paſſes be fit for the *Purity* and *Piety* of one that is led by the Spirit of Chriſt, and is working out her Salvation *with Fear and Trembling*, if the *Stage* be an Entertainment, that may be thought according to the Will of God, then ſhe diſpoſes of an Hour very innocently, tho' her *Mother* or her *Aunt* were not with her. But if the contrary to all this be true, if moſt of what ſhe there hears and ſees, be as *contrary* to the *Piety* and *Purity* of Chriſtianity, as *Feaſting* is contrary to *Faſting*; if the Houſe which ſhe ſupports by her Money, and encourages by her Preſence, be a notorious Means of Corruption, viſibly carrying on the Cauſe of Vice and Debauchery, ſhe muſt not then think her ſelf excus'd for being with her *Mother*.

Thirdly, The ſame Perſon would perhaps think it ſtrange to hear one of her virtuous Acquaintance, giving the like Excuſe for going now and then to a *Maſquerade*.

Now

Now this Diverſion is new in our Country, and therefore People judge of it in the Manner that they ſhould, becauſe they are not blinded by *Uſe and Cuſtom*; but let any one give but the true Reaſons why a Perſon of Virtue and Piety ſhould not give into ſuch Entertainments, and the ſame Reaſons will ſhew, that a Perſon of ſtrict Piety, ſhould keep at as great a Diſtance from the P*lay-houſe*. For the Entertainment of the *Stage* is as directly oppoſite to the P*urity* of Religion, and is as much the *natural Means* of Corruption, and ſerves all bad Ends in as high a Manner as *Maſquerades*, they only differ, as bad Things of the ſame kind may differ from one another. So that if the evil Uſe, the ill Conſequences of *Maſquerades*; be a ſufficient Reaſon to deter People of Piety, from partaking of them, the ſame evil Uſe and ill Conſequences of the *Stage*, ought to keep all People of Virtue from it. If People will conſult their *Temper* only, they may take the Entertainment of one, and condemn the other, as following the ſame Guide, they may abhor *Intemperance*, and indulge *Malice*; but if they will conſult Religion, and make that the Ground of their Opinions, they would find as ſtrong Reaſons for a conſtant Abhorrence of the *Stage*, as of *Maſquerades*.

Farther, She that is for going only to the *Play-houſe* now and then, with this Care and Diſcretion, does not ſeem to have enough conſider'd the Matter, or to act by Reaſon; for if the *Stage* be an innocent and proper Entertainment, if in its own Nature it be as harmleſs and uſeful, as *Walking*, *Riding*, *Taking the Air*, or *Converſing* with virtuous People, if this be the Nature of it, then there is no Need of this Care and Abſtinence, a virtuous

Lady

Lady need not excuſe herſelf, that ſhe goes but very ſeldom. But if it be the very Reverſe of all this, if it be that Fountain of Corruption and Debauchery, which has been obſerv'd, then to go to it at any Time admits of no Excuſe, but is as abſurd, as contrary to Reaſon and Religion, as to do any other ill Thing with the ſame Care and Diſcretion. If you ſhould hear a Perſon excuſing her Uſe of *Paint* in this Manner, that truly ſhe painted but *very ſeldom*, that ſhe always ſaid her Prayers firſt, that ſhe never us'd it on *Sundays*, or the Week before the *Communion*, would you not pity ſuch a *Mixture* of Religion and Weakneſs? Would you not deſire her to uſe her Reaſon, and either allow *painting* to be an innocent Ornament, ſuitable to the *Sobriety* and *Humility* of a Chriſtian, or elſe to think it as unlawful at one Time as at another? Would you not think it ſtrange that ſhe ſhould condemn *painting* as odious and ſinful, and yet think, that the Regularity of her Life, the Exactneſs of her Devotions, and her Obſervance of Religion, might make it lawful for her to *paint now and then?* I don't doubt, but you plainly ſee the Weakneſs and Folly of ſuch a Pretence for *painting* under ſuch Rules at certain Times. And if you would but as impartially conſider your Pretences for going ſometimes to the *Play-houſe*, you would certainly find them equally Weak and Unreaſonable. For *Painting* may with more Reaſon be reckon'd an *innocent Ornament*, than the *Play-houſe* an innocent Diverſion; and it ſuppoſes a greater Vanity of Mind, a more perverted Judgment, and a deeper Corruption of Heart, to ſeek the Diverſion of the *Stage*, than to take the Pleaſure of a *borrow'd Colour*.

I know you are offended at this *Compariſon*, becauſe you judge by your *Temper* and *Prejudices*, and don't conſider the Things, as they are in themſelves, by the pure Light of Reaſon and Religion. *Painting* has not been the Way of your *Family*, it is ſuppoſed to be the Practice but of *very few*, and thoſe who uſe it, endeavour to *conceal* it, this makes you readily condemn it; on the contrary, your *Mother* and your *Aunt* carry you to a *Play*, you ſee *virtuous* People there, and the ſame Perſons that fill our *Churches*, ſo that your *Temper* is as much engag'd to think it lawful to go ſometimes to a *Play*, as it is engag'd to think the Uſe of *Paint* odious and ſinful. Lay aſide therefore theſe Prejudices for a while, fancy that you had been train'd up in ſome Corner of the World, in the Principles of Chriſtianity, and had never heard either of the *Play-houſe* or *Painting*. Imagine now that you was to examine the Lawfulneſs of them by the Doctrines of Scripture. You would firſt deſire to be told the Nature of theſe Things, and what they meant. They would tell you that *painting* was the borrowing of *Colours* from Art, to make the Face look more beautiful. Now tho' you found no expreſs Text of Scripture againſt *painting*, you would find, that it was expreſly againſt *Tempers* requir'd in Scripture; you would therefore condemn it, as proceeding from a *Vanity* of Mind, a *Fondneſs* of Beauty; you would ſee that the Harm of *painting* conſiſted in this, that it proceeded from a *Temper* of Mind, contrary to the *Sobriety* and *Humility* of a Chriſtian, which indeed is Harm enough, becauſe this *Humility* and *Sobriety* of Mind is as *eſſential* to Religion, as Charity and Devotion. So that in judging according to Scripture, you would hold it as unreaſonable to

paint

paint ſometimes, as to be ſometimes *malicious*, *indevout*, *proud*, or *falſe*.

You are now to conſider the *Stage*, you are to keep cloſe to Scripture, and fancy that you yet know nothing of *Plays*. You ask therefore firſt what the *Stage* or *Play-houſe* is. You are told that it is a *Place* where all Sorts of People meet to be entertained with *Diſcourſes*, *Actions*, and *Repreſentations*, which are recommended to the Heart, by beautiful Scenes, the Splendor of Lights, and the Harmony of Muſick. You are told, that theſe Diſcourſes are the Inventions of Men of Wit and Imagination, which deſcribe imaginary *Intrigues* and *Scenes of Love*, and introduce *Men* and *Women* diſcourſing, raving, and acting in all the wild, indecent Tranſports of *Luſt* and *Paſſion*. You are told that the Diverſion partly conſiſts of *lewd* and *prophane* Songs, ſung to fine Muſick, and partly of extravagant Dialogues between *immodeſt Perſons*, talking in a Stile of *Love* and *Madneſs*, that is no where elſe to be found, and entertaining the *Chriſtian Audience*, with all the the Violence of Paſſion, Corruption of Heart, Wantonneſs of Mind, Immodeſty of Thought, and prophane Jeſts, that the Wit of the *Poet* is able to invent. You are told, that the *Players*, Men and Women, are trained up to act and repreſent all the Deſcriptions of Luſt and Paſſion in the *livelieſt Manner*, to add a Lewdneſs of Action to lewd Speeches; that they get their Livelihood, by *Curſing*, *Swearing*, and *Ranting*, for three Hours together to an Aſſembly of *Chriſtians*.

Now though you find no particular Text of Scripture condemning the *Stage*, or *Tragedy*, or *Comedy*, in expreſs Words, yet, what is much more, you find that ſuch Entertainments are a groſs Contradiction

tradiction to the *whole Nature* of Religion. They are not contrary to this or that particular Temper, but are contrary to that *whole Turn* of Heart and Mind which Religion requires. *Painting* is contrary to *Humility*, and therefore is always to be avoided as ſinful. But the Entertainment of the *Stage*, as it conſiſts of *blaſphemous* Expreſſions, *wicked* Speeches, *Swearing*, *Curſing*, and *Prophaning* the Name of God, as it abounds with *impious* Rant, *filthy* Jeſts, *diſtracted* Paſſions, groſs Deſcriptions of *Luſt*, and *wanton Songs*, is a *Contradiction to every Doctrine* that our Saviour and his Apoſtles have taught us. So that to abhor *Painting* at all Times, becauſe it ſuppoſes a Vanity of Mind, and is contrary to Humility, and yet think there is a lawful Time to go to the *Play-houſe*, is as contrary to common Senſe, as if a Man ſhould hold that it was lawful ſometimes to offend againſt *all the Doctrines* of Religion, and yet always unlawful to offend againſt *any one* Doctrine of Religion.

If therefore you was to come (as I ſuppoſed) from ſome Corner of the World, where you had been uſed to live and judge by the Rules of Religion, and upon your Arrival here, had been told what *Painting* and the *Stage* was; as you would not expect to ſee Perſons of *religious Humility* carrying their Daughters to *Paint-ſhops*, or inviting their *pious Friends* to go along with them, ſo much leſs would you expect to hear, that *devout*, *pious* and *modeſt* Women carried their Daughters, and invited their virtuous Friends to meet them at the *Play*. Leaſt of all could you imagine, that there were any People *too pious* and *devout* to indulge the Vanity of *Painting*, and yet not devout or pious enough to *abhor*

the Immodeſty, Prophaneſs, Ribbaldry, Immorality, and Blaſphemy of the *Stage*.

To proceed. A *polite Writer* (*a*) of a late Paper thought he had ſufficiently ridiculed a certain Lady's Pretenſion to *Piety*, when ſpeaking of her *Cloſet*, he ſays,

Together ly her Prayer-book and Paint,
At once t' improve the Sinner and the Saint.

Now whence comes it that this *Writer* judges ſo rightly, and ſpeaks the Truth ſo plainly in the Matter of *Painting*? Whence comes it that the Generality of his Readers think his Obſervation juſt, and join with him in it? It is becauſe *Painting* is not yet an *acknowledged Practice*, but is for the moſt Part reckoned a *ſhameful Inſtance* of Vanity. Now as we are not prejudiced in Favour of this Practice, and have no Excuſes to make for our *own Share* in it, ſo we judge of it impartially, and immediately perceive its Contrariety to a religious Temper and State of Mind. This *Writer* ſaw this in ſo ſtrong a Light, that he does not ſcruple to ſuppoſe, that *Paint* is as natural and proper a Means to improve the *Sinner*, as the Prayer-book is to improve the *Saint*.

I ſhould therefore hope, that it need not be imputed to any *Sowreneſs* of Temper, religious *Weakneſs* or *Dulneſs* of Spirits, if a *Clergyman* ſhould imagine, that the Prophaneſs, Debauchery, Lewdneſs, and Blaſphemy of the *Stage*, is as natural a Means to improve the *Sinner*, as a *Bottle of Paint*; or if he ſhould venture to ſhew, that the *Church* and the *Play-houſe* are as ridiculous a Contradiction, and do

do no more ſuit with the *ſame* Perſon, than the *Prayer-book* and *Paint*.

Again, SUPPOSE you were told that the *holy Angels* delight in the Repentance and Devotion of Chriſtians, that they attend at God's *Altar*, and rejoice in the Prayers and Praiſes, which are there offer'd unto God; I imagine you could eaſily believe it: you could think it very agreeable to the Nature of ſuch good Beings, to ſee *fallen Spirits* returning unto God. Suppoſe you were told alſo, that theſe ſame heavenly Beings delighted to be with Men in their *Drunkenneſs*, *Revellings*, and *Debaucheries*, and were as much pleaſed with their Vices and Corruptions, as with their Devotions, you would know, that both theſe Accounts could not poſſibly be true; you could no more doubt in your Mind, whether *good Angels*, that delight in the Converſion and Devotion of Chriſtians, do alſo delight in their Vices and Follies, than you can doubt, whether the ſame Perſon can be *alive* and *dead* at the ſame Time. You would be ſure, that in Proportion as they delighted in the *Piety* and *Holineſs* of Men, they muſt neceſſarily in the ſame Degree abhor and diſlike their *Vices* and *Corruptions*. So that, ſuppoſing the Matter of our *Church-Service*, the Excellency of its Devotions, its heavenly Petitions, its lofty Hymns, its ſolemn Praiſes of the moſt High God, be ſuch a glorious Service as invites and procures the Attendance of that *bleſſed Quire*; if this be true, I ſuppoſe you are as certain as you can be of the plaineſt Truth, that the *Filthineſs*, the *Rant*, *Ribbaldry*, *Prophaneſs*, and *Impiety* of the *Stage*, muſt be the Hatred and Averſion of thoſe *good Spirits*. You are ſure, that it is as impoſſible for them to behold the *Stage*

with Pleaſure, as to look upon the *Holy Altar* with Abhorrence.

CONSIDER a while on this Matter, and think how it can be lawful for you to go to a *Place*, where if a *good Angel* was to look with Pleaſure, it would ceaſe to be good? For as that which makes Angels good, is the ſame *right Temper* which makes you good, ſo the ſame Tempers which would render Angels evil, muſt alſo render you evil. You may perhaps tell me, that you are not an *Angel*. I grant it, neither are you Jeſus Chriſt, neither are you God, yet you are called to be *Holy* as Jeſus Chriſt was *Holy*, and *to be Perfect as your Father which is in Heaven is Perfect*. Though you are not an *Angel*, yet it is Part of your glorious Hope, that you ſhall be *as the Angels of God*; ſo that as you are capable of their Happineſs, you muſt think your ſelf obliged to be as like them in your Temper, as the Infirmity of your preſent State will permit. If *Angels* are to rejoice in ſinging the Praiſes of God, though their Joy may exceed yours, yet you are as much obliged to your Degree of Joy in this Duty, as they are. Angels by the Light and Strength of their Nature, may abhor all Manner of Sin with ſtronger Averſion, a higher Degree of Abhorrence, yet you are as much obliged to abhor all Manner of Sin, as they are. So that it is no more lawful for you to delight in impure, prophane Diverſions, which *good Angels* abhor, than it is lawful for you to hate thoſe *Praiſes* and *Adorations* which are their Delight.

YOU are to conſider alſo, that theſe *contradictory Tempers* are no more poſſible in the *ſame Men*, than in the *ſame Angels*; 'tis no more poſſible for your Heart truly to delight in the Service of the Church, to be in Earneſt in all its Devotions, and at the ſame Time

delight in the Entertainment of the *Stage*, than it is poſſible for an *Angel* to delight in them both.

You may fanſy that you reliſh theſe Entertainments, and at the ſame Time reliſh and delight in the Service of God, and are very hearty in your Devotions; you may fanſy this, as *cruel* Men may fanſy themſelves to be *merciful*, the *covetous* and *proud* may fanſy themſelves to be *humble* and *heavenly-minded*; but then take Notice, that it is all but mere Fancy: For it is as impoſſible to be really devout with your Reaſon and Underſtanding, and at the ſame delight in the Entertainment of the *Stage*, as 'tis impoſſible to be really *charitable*, and delighting in *Malice* at the ſame Time. There is indeed a *Falſeneſs* in our Hearts, a *Mechaniſm* in our Conſtitution, which will deceive thoſe, who do not conſtantly *ſuſpect* themſelves. There are *Forms of Devotion*, little Rules of Religion, which are fixed in us by *Education*, which we can no more part with, than we can part with any other Cuſtoms, which we have long uſed. Now this makes many People think themſelves mighty pious, becauſe they find it is not in their Nature to forbear or neglect ſuch and ſuch *Forms of Piety*; they fanſy that Religion muſt have its Seat in their Heart, becauſe their Heart is ſo unalterable in *certain Rules* of Religion. Thus a Perſon is exact in his Times of Prayer, will perhaps think himſelf much injured, if you was to tell him that it is his *Want of Piety*, that makes him reliſh the Diverſion of the *Stage*: His Heart immediately juſtifies him againſt ſuch an Accuſation, and tells him how conſtant he is in his Devotions; whereas it is very poſſible, that he may have but little more Piety, than what conſiſts in ſome *Rules* and *Forms*, and that his Conſtancy to ſuch Rules, may be owing

ing to the ſame Cauſe, which makes others conſtantly *ſleepy* at ſuch an Hour, that is, the mere *Mechaniſm* of his Conſtitution, and the Force of *Cuſtom*. This is the State of Numbers of People, otherwiſe it would not be ſo common, to ſee the ſame People conſtant and unalterable in *ſome Rules* of Religion, and as conſtant and unalterable in *Pride*, *Paſſion*, and *Vanity*.

Again, THERE are many other Inſtances of a falſe Piety: Some People feel themſelves capable of *religious Fervours*, they have their Paſſions frequently affected with *religious Subjects*, who from thence imagine, that their Hearts is in a true State of Religion. But ſuch a Concluſion is very deceitful. For the mere *Mechaniſm* and natural Temper of our Bodies, and our preſent Condition, may be the chief Foundation of all this. Thus a *Lady* may find herſelf, as ſhe thinks, *warm* in her Devotions, and praiſe God at *Church* with a Senſe of Joy; ſhe thinks ſhe is very good, becauſe ſhe finds herſelf thus *affected* and *pleaſed* with the Service of the *Church*; whereas it may be, the very Reaſon why ſhe is more than ordinarily devout, and thinks it a Pleaſure to praiſe God, is, becauſe ſhe is going to a *Ball*, or a *Play*, as ſoon as Divine Service is over. This agreeable Expectation has ſo put her Spirits in Order, that ſhe can be very *thankful* to God all the Time ſhe is at *Church*.

ANOTHER has been pleaſed with the Compliments paid to her Perſon, ſhe finds herſelf very *finely dreſs'd*, ſhe is full of Joy under *ſuch Thoughts*, and ſo can eaſily break out into *Fervours of Devotion*, and rejoice in God at a Time, when ſhe can rejoice in *any Thing*. Theſe frequent Starts of Devotion makes her think herſelf to be far advanced in Piety,

and

and ſhe does not perceive that the *Height* of her Devotion is owing to the Height of her Vanity. Let her but be *leſs pleaſed* with herſelf, let her be *unregarded*, *undreſſed*, without ſuch *pleaſing Reflections*, and ſhe will find herſelf ſunk into a ſtrange *Dulneſs* towards Devotion.

THE ſame Temper is very frequent in *common Life*; you meet a Perſon who is very fond of you, full of Affection, and pleaſed with every Thing you ſay or do; you muſt not imagine that he has more *Friendſhip* for you, than when he ſaw you laſt, and hardly took any Notice of you: The Matter is only this, the Man is in a *State of Joy* at ſomething or other, he is pleaſed with *himſelf*, and ſo is eaſily pleaſed with you, ſtay but till this *Flow of Spirits* is gone off, and he will ſhew you no more Affection than he us'd to do. This is the Religion of *Numbers* of People; they are devout by *Fits* and *Starts*, in the ſame Manner as they are pleaſed by *Fits* and *Starts*, and their Devotion at thoſe very Times is no more a Sign of true *Piety*, than the Civility and Compliments of a Perſon *overjoyed*, are Signs of true *Friendſhip*. But ſtill theſe little Flaſhes of Devotion make People think themſelves in a State of Religion.

TAKE another Inſtance of a falſe Piety of another kind: *Junius* has been orthodox in his Faith, a Lover of Churchmen, a Hater of Hereticks, theſe ſeveral Years; he is the firſt that is ſorry for a *dangerous Book* that is come out, he is amazed what People would be at by ſuch Writings, but thanks God there is Learning enough in the World to confute them; he reads all the Confutations of *Atheiſts*, *Deiſts*, and *Hereticks*, there is only one ſort of Books, for which *Junius* has no Taſte, and that is,

is, Books of *Devotion*. He freely owns that they are not for his Taſte, he doesnot *underſtand their Flights*.

If another Perſon was to ſay ſo much, it would be imputed to his Want of Piety; but becauſe *Junius* is known to be an Enemy to Irreligion, becauſe he is conſtantly at Church, you ſuppoſe him to be a pious Man, though he thus confeſſes that he wants the *Spirit of Piety*. It is in the ſame Manner that *Junius* deceives himſelf, his Heart permits him to neglect Books of Devotion, becauſe his Heart is conſtantly ſhewing him his *Zeal* for Religion, and *Honour* for the Church; this makes him no more ſuſpect himſelf to want any Degrees of Piety, than he ſuſpects himſelf to be a Favourer of *Hereſy*. If he never thinks any ill of himſelf, if he never ſuſpects any Falſeneſs in his own Heart, if he is prejudiced in favour of all his own Ways, it is becauſe he is prejudiced in favour of all *orthodox Men*. *Junius* reads much Controverſy, yet he does not take it ill, that you pretend to inform him in Matters of *Controverſy*; on the contrary, he never reads Books of Devotion, yet is angry if you pretend to correct him in Matters of that kind. You may ſuppoſe him miſtaken in ſomething that he is always ſtudying, and he will be thankful to you for ſetting him right; but if you ſuppoſe him miſtaken in Things that he never applies himſelf to, if you ſuppoſe that any Body knows what *Humility*, *Heavenly-mindedneſs*, *Devotion*, *Self-denial*, *Mortification*, *Repentance*, *Charity*, or the *Love* of God is, better than he, you provoke his Temper, and he won't ſuffer himſelf to be informed by you. *Great Numbers* of People are like *Junius* in this Reſpect, they think they are very religious by liſtening to Inſtruction upon *certain Points*, by reading *certain Books*, and being

ing ready to receive farther Light, who yet cannot bear to be inſtructed in Matters where they are moſt likely to be deceived, and where the Deceit is of the utmoſt Danger. They will be thankful for your telling them the particular Times in which the *Goſpels* were writ, for explaining the Word *Euroclydon*, or *Anathema Maranatha*, they will be glad of ſuch uſeful Inſtruction, but if you touch upon ſuch Subjects as really concern them in a high Degree, ſuch as try the *State* and *Way* of their Lives, theſe religious People, who are ſo fond of religious Truths, cannot bear to be thus inſtructed.

WHAT is the Reaſon that when we conſult *Lawyers*, it is not to hear Harangues upon the *Law*, or its ſeveral *Courts*; it is not to hear the Variety of Caſes that concern other People, but it is to be inſtructed and aſſiſted in our *own Caſe*? Why do we thank them for dealing impartially with us, for ſearching and examining into the true State of our *Caſe*, and informing us of every Thing that concerns us? What is the Reaſon that we apply to *Phyſicians*, not to hear the Riſe and Progreſs of *Phyſick*, or the Hiſtory of Diſputes amongſt them, not to hear of other People's Diſtempers, but to tell them our own *particular State*, and learn the *Cure* of our own Diſtempers? Why do we thank them for being *nicely exact* in ſearching us out, for examining into every Part of our Lives, our Ways of *eating*, *drinking*, and *ſleeping*, and not ſuffering us to deceive our ſelves with wrong Opinions and Practices? What is the Reaſon why we act thus conſiſtently, and in the ſame Manner, in both theſe Inſtances? Now the only Reaſon is this, becauſe in both theſe Inſtances we are *really in earneſt*. When you are in earneſt in your Religion, you will act as conſiſtently

and in the ſame Manner there. When you deſire *ſolid Piety*, as you deſire *ſound Health*, your chief Concern will be about your *own Diſorders*; you will thank *Divines* and *Caſuiſts* for making you their chief Care, you will be glad to have them examine and ſearch into your Ways of Life, to be rightly informed of the Follies, Vanities, and Dangers, of your State. You will be glad to read thoſe Books, and conſult thoſe *Caſuiſts*, which are moſt *exact* and *faithful* in diſcovering your Faults, who queſtion and examine all your Ways, who diſcover to you your *ſecret* Corruptions, and *unſuſpected* Follies, and who are beſt able to give you the ſureſt Rules of arriving at Chriſtian Perfection; when you are in earneſt in your Religion, you will as certainly act in this Manner, as you act in the ſame Manner with the *Lawyer* or *Phyſician*. Take this alſo for an undeniable Truth, that till you do act in this Manner, you are not in earneſt in your Religion. This therefore is a good Rule to examine your ſelf by. Do you find that you act in Religion as you do in other Caſes, where you are in earneſt? Are you as ſuſpicious of your ſelf, as fearful of Miſtake, as watchful of Danger, as glad of Aſſiſtance, as deſirous of Succeſs, as in other Matters where your Life or Fortune are at ſtake, or where your Heart is engaged? Never imagine that your Religion is founded in a true Fear of God, and a hearty Deſire of Salvation, till you find your ſelf acting as you do in other Matters, where your Fears are great, and your Deſires hearty. If you had rather read Books that *entertain* the Mind, than *correct* the Heart, if you had rather hear a *Caſuiſt* examine other People's Lives, than your's, if you had rather hear him talk of the Excellency and Wiſdom of

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Religion, than be exact in trying the Excellency and Wiſdom of your Way of Life, you muſt take it for granted, that you are not in earneſt in the Reformation of your Life, and that there are *ſome Tempers* in you more ſtrong and powerful, that more rule and govern you, than the Fear of God, and a Deſire of Salvation. To return now to my Subject.

I HAD obſerved that People who are religious upon a true Principle, who are devout with their *Reaſon* and *Underſtanding*, cannot poſſibly either *reliſh* or *allow* the Entertainment of the *Stage*. I obſerved that theſe contradictory Tempers, a Delight in the Offices and Divine Services of the *Church*, and a Delight in the Entertainments of the *Stage*, are no more poſſible to be in the ſame *good Men*, than in the ſame *good Angels*. This made it neceſſary for me to ſtep a little aſide from my Subject, to conſider ſome *falſe Appearances* of Religion, which are chiefly founded in *natural Temper*, *Cuſtom*, *Education*, and the *Way* of the World; which yet ſo far deceive People, as to make them fancy themſelves in a good State of Religion, while they live and act by another Spirit and Temper.

NOW I readily own, a Man may come up to theſe Appearances of Religion, he may carry on a Courſe of ſuch Piety as this, and yet *reliſh* the Diverſion of the *Stage*. It is no Contradiction for a Man to like to ſay his Prayers, to be often delighted with the Service of the *Church*, to hear *Sermons*, to read *Divinity*, to deteſt *Hereticks*, and yet find a conſtant *Pleaſure* in the vain Entertainments of the *Stage*. The World abounds with Inſtances of People who *ſwear*, *drink* and *debauch*, with all theſe *Appearances* of Religion. Now as we are ſure that where we

ſee

ſee theſe Views, thoſe Perſons have only an *Appearance* of Religion, which is founded in ſomething elſe than a true Fear of God; ſo wherever we ſee ſober and regular People, Lovers of the Church, and Friends to Religion, taking the Pleaſure of the *Stage*, we may be as ſure that their Religion is *defective*, and founded in ſomething that is *weak*, and *falſe*, and *blind*, that permits them to act ſo inconſiſtently. For the reaſoning is full as ſtrong in one Caſe as in the other Now although I would not have People to be ſolely guided by what they feel, or think they feel in their own Minds, yet this we may depend upon, as certain in our Tempers, that we never *love* or *affect* any thing *truly*, but we *hate* and *avoid* all that is *contrary* to it in an equal Degree. So that we may be aſſured, that all that Love, or Zeal, or Affection, that we pretend for any thing, is but mere Pretence, and a *blind Motion*, unleſs it appears by a zealous lively Abhorrence of every thing that is *contrary* to it. Upon this Ground I again affirm, that it is impoſſible for truly religious People to *bear* the Entertainments of the *Stage*. For conſider only the Matter in this ſhort View. A truly religious Perſon is to love and fear, and adore God, with *all his Heart, and with all his Soul, and with all his Strength*; now I ask you, who it is that has this true Love of God? Is it he that delights in Prophaneſs at *all Times*? Or is it he that can bear with Prophaneſs *ſometimes*? Or is it he that abhors and avoids it at *all Times* and in *all Places*? Which of theſe three hath a Right to be eſteemed a true Lover of God? Now he that goes to a *Play* at any Time, though he may ſay that he does not delight in *Prophaneſs*, yet he muſt own that he can ſometimes, and in ſome Places,

bear

bear with Prophaneſs. For Prophaneſs of ſome kind or other, is in moſt of our *Plays*, almoſt as common, as the Name of God in Scripture. But I will ſuppoſe it were only now and then, and that no Prophaneſs either of Thought or Expreſſion happened above *twice* or *thrice* in an Entertainment, yet this is *Prophaneſs*, and he that can bear with *ſo much*, that can ſeek the Entertainment as a Pleaſure, muſt acknowledge, that though he does not delight in Prophaneſs as ſuch, yet he can *bear* with Prophaneſs for the Sake of *other Delights*. Now ask your ſelf, has not he a truer Love of God whoſe Piety will not ſuffer him to bear with Prophaneſs at any Time, or in any Place, or for any Pleaſure? Am I not therefore ſupported by plain Reaſon and common Senſe when I affirm, that it is for Want of true Piety, that any People are able to bear the Entertainment of the *Stage*.

You ſee alſo that no higher Degree of Piety, is rquired to fill one with a conſtant Abhorrence of the *Stage*, than ſuch a Piety, as implies an Abhorrence of Prophaneſs at *all* Times, and in *all* Places.

When you are thus pious, when you thus love God, you will have a Piety, a Love of God that will not ſuffer you to be at an Entertainment that has any *Mixture* of Prophaneſs. Now as there muſt be this manifeſt Defect in true Piety, before you can bear with the Prophaneſs of the *Stage*; ſo if you conſider every other Part of the Character of a truly religious Man, you will find, that there muſt be the ſame Defect run through the whole of it, before he can be fit for ſuch Diverſion.

You tell me that you love the *Church*, and rejoice at the Returns of Divine-Service, though you now and then go to a *Play*. Now conſider what it

is

is which these Words mean, *If you love and delight in the Service of the Church*, then you love to be in a *State* of Devotion, you love to *draw near* to God, you love to be made sensible of the *Misery*, *Guilt*, and *Weight* of Sin, you love to *abhor* and *deplore* your Iniquities, and to lament the *Misery* and *Vanity* of human Life; you love to hear the Instructions of *Divine Wisdom*, to *raise* your Soul unto God, and *sing* his Praises; you love to be on your Knees *praying* against all the *Vanities* and *Follies* of Life, and for all the *Gifts* and *Graces* of God's Holy Spirit.

Now all this is implied in the true Love of *Church-Service*; for unless you love it *for what it is*, and because you feel its Excellency, your Love is only a *blind*, *mechanical* Motion; but if you love it in Truth and Reality, if you are thus affected with it, because all its Parts so highly suit the Condition of human Nature, whilst you are thus disposed, you can no more relish the *wicked Spirit* and *foolish Temper* of Stage-Entertainments, than *sincere*, *dying* Penitents can delight in the *Guilt* of their Sins.

Never imagine therefore, that you are sincerely affected with the *Confessions* of the Church, or that you are truly *glad* for the Return of those Hours, which humble you in the Sight of God, never imagine that you truly feel the Misery and Weight of Sin, or sincerely lament the Corruption of your Nature, whilst you dare go to the Fountain-head of Corruption, the Place where Sin reigns, and exercises its highest Power.

Never imagine that you have the Spirit of Devotion, that your Heart is renewed with the Holy Ghost, that it truly rejoices in the Means of Grace, and

and the Hope of Glory; never imagine that it is your Joy and Delight to worſhip God in the Beauty of Holineſs, to ſend up your Souls to him in Prayers and Praiſes, ſo long as the Way of the *Stage*, its *impious* Nonſenſe, *vile* Jeſts, *prophane* Paſſions, and *lewd* Speeches, are not your utter Abhorrence. For it is not more abſurd to believe, that a *corrupt* Tree may bring forth *good Fruit*, than to believe, that a pious Mind, truly devoted to God, ſhould taſte and reliſh the Entertainment of the *Stage*. For the *Taſte* and *Reliſh* of the Mind is a more certain Sign of the State and Nature of the Mind, than the Quality of *Fruit* is a Sign of the State and Nature of *Trees*.

HAD the *impure Spirits*, which asked our Bleſſed Saviour, to ſuffer them to enter into the *Herd of Swine*, ſaid at the ſame time, that it was their only *Delight* and *Joy* to dwell in the Light and Splendor of God, no one could have believed them, any more than he could believe Light and Darkneſs to be the ſame Thing.

WHEN you have the Spirit of Chriſt, when you are devoted to God, when Purity, Holineſs, and Perfection is your real Care, when you deſire to live in the Light of God's Holy Spirit, to act by his Motions, to riſe from Grace to Grace, till you are finiſhed in Glory, it will be as impoſſible for you, whilſt you continue ſo diſpoſed, either to *ſeek* or *bear* the Entertainment of the *Stage*, as it is impoſſible for *pure* and *holy Spirits* to ask to enter into a *Herd of Swine*. If you want the Delight of ſo corrupt an Entertainment, ſo contrary to the *Spirit* and *Purity* of Religion, you ought no more to believe your ſelf, when you pretend to true *Piety* and *Devotion*, than you ought to have believed thoſe *impure Spirits*, if they had pretended to have been *Angels*

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of Light. For this is abſolutely certain, and what you ought carefully to conſider, that nothing ever gives us any Pleaſure, but what is *ſuitable* to the *State* and *Temper* of Mind that we are then in. So that if the *Corruption*, the *Immorality*, the *prophane* Spirit and *wanton* Temper of the *Stage-Entertainment* can give you any Pleaſure, you are as ſure that there is *ſomething* like *all theſe Vices* in your Heart, as you can be of any Thing that relates to a human Mind.

Laſtly, Ask your ſelf, when you think that you have a true Love for Divine-Service, whether he is not a truer Lover of it, whoſe Soul is ſo *faſhioned* to it, ſo *deeply affected* with it, that he can delight in nothing that is *contrary* to it; who can bear with *no* Entertainment that is made up of *Speeches*, *Paſſions*, *Harangues*, and Songs ſo *oppoſite* to the Wiſdom, the Diſcourſes, Inſtructions, and Hymns, of Divine-Service. This I believe, you cannot deny, and if this cannot be denied, then it muſt be owned as a certain Truth, that he who can bear with the *Stage-Entertainment*, has this farther Defect, that he wants the *true Love* of Divine-Service.

Again, It is Part of a truly religious Man, to *love* the Scripture, and *delight* in reading them; you ſay this is your Temper, though you go to *Plays*. I anſwer, that it is for want of a true Love and Delight in the Scriptures, that you are able to reliſh *Plays*. You may perhaps ſo love the Scriptures, that you may think it your Duty to read them; and deſire to underſtand them. But when you once ſo love the Scriptures, as to *love* to be *like* them, to deſire that the Spirit and Temper of Scripture, may be the *one Spirit and Temper* of your Life: When, for Inſtance, you love this Doctrine,

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Strive to enter in at the ſtrait Gate. If thy right Eye offend thee, pluck it out and caſt it from thee. When you are of the ſame Mind with this Scripture, *be ſober, be vigilant, becauſe your Adverſary the Devil,* as a roaring Lion, *walketh about ſeeking whom he may devour* (*a*).

When you are intent upon this Truth, *For we muſt all appear before the Judgment-Seat of Chriſt, that every one may receive the Things done in his Body* (*b*). When this Text has taken Poſſeſſion of your Heart, *Seeing then that all theſe Things muſt be diſſolved, what Manner of Perſons ought ye to be in all holy Converſation and Godlineſs* (*c*)?

When you reſign up your whole Soul to this Exhortation, *Take my Yoke upon you, and learn of me for I am meek and lowly in Heart* (*d*). When your Heart can truly bear you witneſs to this Doctrine, that you *put on the whole Armour of Chriſt, that you may be able to ſtand, that you live by Faith* and *not by Sight, preſſing after the Prize of your high Calling.* When you thus love and delight in the Scriptures, when you thus enter into its Spirit and Temper, when its Purity is your Purity, its Fears, and Hopes, and Joys, are your Fears, and Hopes, and Joys, you will find your ſelf one of thoſe, who conſtantly and at *all Times* abominate the Folly, Impertinence and Prophaneſs of the *Stage.*

Let me deſire you, when you are dreſs'd for a *Play,* to read over our Saviour's Divine Sermon on the *Mount* before you go; try whether your Soul is full of the Spirit that is there taught, examine whether you then feel in your Heart ſuch a Love of

(*a*) 1 Pet. iii. 8. (*b*) 2 Cor. v. 10. (*c*) 2 Pet. iii. 11. (*d*) Matth. xi. 29.

the Scripture, as to love *those Conditions* of Bleſſedneſs that are there deſcribed, *Bleſſed are the poor in Spirit, bleſſed are they that Mourn, bleſſed are they that Hunger and Thirſt after Righteouſneſs.* Do you find your ſelf in theſe Heights of *Holineſs?* Is your Soul reform'd, purify'd and exalted according to *theſe Doctrines?* Or can you imagine, that you are *conforming* your ſelf to thoſe Doctrines, that you *depart* from none of them, when you are preparing your ſelf for a Pleaſure, which is the proper Pleaſure of the moſt corrupt and debauched Minds? *Bleſſed are the pure in Heart for they ſhall ſee God.* Can you think that you are rightly affected with this Doctrine, that you are labouring after this Purity, that you are preparing to ſee God, when you are going to an Entertainment, to which they ought only to go, who have no Thoughts of ſeeing God, nor any Deſires after that Purity which prepares us for it?

Laſtly, ANOTHER Virtue eſſential to Chriſtian Holineſs is *Chaſtity,* our Bleſſed Saviour has given us the Meaſure of this Virtue in theſe Words. *But I ſay unto you, That whoſoever looketh on a Woman to luſt after her, hath committed Adultery with her already in his Heart.* We are ſure therefore that this Virtue is not preſerv'd, unleſs we keep our ſelves clear from all immodeſt Thoughts and impure Imaginations; we are ſure alſo that the Guilt of theſe is like the Guilt of Adultery. This is the Doctrine of Chriſt. Look now into the *Play-houſe,* and think whether any Thing can be imagin'd more contrary to this Doctrine?

FOR, not to conſider the monſtrous Lewdneſs and Immodeſty of the *Stage,* take it in its *beſt State,* when ſome admir'd *Tragedy* is upon it. Are the

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extravagant Paſſions of *diſtracted Lovers*, the impure Ravings of *inflam'd Heroes*, the tender Complaints, the Joys and Torments of Love, and *groſs Deſcriptions* of Luſt; are the *indecent* Actions, the amorous Tranſports, the *wanton Addreſs* of the Actors, which make ſo great a Part of the *moſt ſober and modeſt* Tragedies, are theſe Things an Entertainment conſiſtent with this Chriſtian Doctrine? You may as well imagine, that Murder and Rapine are conſiſtent with Charity and Meekneſs. I hope it will not now be ſaid, that I have ſpent too much Time upon this Subject. For tho' theſe Things are generally look'd upon as *little*, becauſe they are called *Pleaſures* and *Diverſions*, yet they may as juſtly be called *Vices* and *Debaucheries*; they affect Religion, as *Lies* and *Falſhood* affect it, in the very Heart and Eſſence, and render People as incapable of true Piety, as any of the groſſeſt Indulgencies of Senſuality and Intemperance. And perhaps it may be true, that more People are kept Strangers to the true Spirit of Religion, by what are called *Pleaſures*, *Diverſions*, and *Amuſements*, than by *confeſs'd Vices*, or the Cares and Buſineſs of Life. I have now only one Thing to beg of the *Reader*, that he would not think it a ſufficient Anſwer to all this, to ſay in general, That it is a Doctrine too *ſtrict* and *rigid*, but that he would conſider every Argument as it is in itſelf, not whether it be ſtrict and rigid, but whether it be falſe Reaſoning, or more ſtrict and rigid than the Doctrine of Scripture: If it preſcribes a Purity and Holineſs, which is not according to the Spirit and Temper of the Scriptures, let it be rejected, not as too ſtrict and rigid, but as a Species of falſe Worſhip, as vain and ridiculous as *Idolatry*:

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But if what is here asserted be highly conformable to the most plain Doctrines of Scripture, the saying that it is too strict and rigid, is of no more Weight against it, than if it was said, that it was *too true*. It is not my Intention to trouble the World with any particular Notions of my own; or to impose any unnecessary Rules, or fansy'd Degrees of Perfection upon any People. But in declaring against the *Stage*, as I have done, I have no more follow'd any particular Spirit or private Temper, or any more exceeded the plain Doctrine of Scripture, than if I had declared against *Drunkenness* and *Debauchery*. Let a Man but be so much a *Christian*, as not to think it too *high a Degree* of Perfection, or too *strict* and *rigid* to be in Earnest in these two Petitions, *Lead us not into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil*; and he has Christianity enough to persuade him, that it is neither too high a Perfection, nor too *strict* and *rigid*, constantly to declare against, and always to avoid the Entertainment of the *Stage*.

FINIS.